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ABSTRACT

Parents (N=282) and teachers (N=121) were surveyed on academic and social issues involved in mainstreaming handicapped students. Teachers and parents represented four different educational settings: a minimally mainstreamed public school, a heavily mainstreamed public school, a special school for students with disabilities, and a reverse mainstreamed school (a special school that also enrolls nonhandicapped students). Regular school parents and teachers had the greatest agreement in responses, generally believing that their children and students were appropriately or very independent for their ages. Both expressed strong support for mainstreaming despite concerns about the number and nature of disabilities. More parents than teachers felt that only teachers with special education training should teach disabled students. Other results included that regular and special school teachers had more trepidations about mainstreaming than did teachers in a mainstreamed or reverse mainstreamed school; parents of special education students and teachers listed physical safety and opportunities to participate in extra curricular activities as their major concerns in mainstreaming; and teachers seemed to view mainstreaming primarily in terms of the effect it had on their jobs. (CL)

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Comparisons of Parent and Teacher Attitudes Towards Mainstreaming:

by Paul Henfield and Maria Stieglitz

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Parent Teacher Survey

The major objective of this study is to assess attitudes of parents and teachers towards mainstreaming and two related subjects of particular importance for children with disabilities: independence and future educational and career expectations.

A study by Horne in 1978 found that teachers' behavior towards a student directly related to their positive or negative perceptions of that student. This has important implications for mainstreaming because possible negative predilections of teachers and/or parents can hinder a successful mainstreaming experience. The role of parents, both of able-bodied and disabled students, must also be stressed. Karnes, in a 1977 study, noted that parental attitudes and values influence children and that their influence has a greater effect than that of teachers. Therefore, those professionals involved in formulating mainstreaming policies must be aware of the attitudes of both parents and teachers towards mainstreaming and they also need to identify factors which may affect these attitudes.

Valuable information can be gained if parents' and teachers' attitudes can be compared. Davison, in a 1980 study, found that poor communication frequently exists between parents and teachers as a result of their different perceptions of the

child's school experience. Therefore, identifying attitudes of parents and teachers toward academic and social issues involved in mainstreaming is the first step to clear communication between the two groups.

Numerous studies have investigated attitudes of regular and special educators toward mainstreaming (Alexander & Strain 1978; Harasymiw & Horne, 1975; Clark, 1976; Reynolds, Greco, 1979; Stephen, Brown, 1980). However, little literature exists on parental attitudes toward mainstreaming. Also, most research which exists focuses on teacher attitudes toward specific disability types and does not generate general information on teacher attitudes toward mainstreaming.

This study is significant in that it surveys the attitudes of parents and teachers associated with four different educational settings: a minimally mainstreamed public school, a heavily mainstreamed public school, a special school for students with disabilities, and a reverse mainstreamed school, i.e. a special school that also enrolls able-bodied students. Parents and teachers of both disabled children/students and able-bodied children/students are included in the sample.

The survey results help answer the following research questions:

1. Does the type of school parents and teachers are associated with significantly affect their attitudes towards mainstreaming?

2. In what ways do parents and teachers differ in their attitudes toward mainstreaming?

3. In what ways do parents of able-bodied students differ from parents of disabled children in their attitudes toward mainstreaming?

Two questionnaires: "Help Us Help Your Child: A Parent Survey" and "Education in the 80's: A Teacher Survey" were constructed for this study. Each questionnaire is composed of two sections. The first section consists of statements and questions about mainstreaming, children's independence, and future expectations that parents and teachers have for their children and students. The format of this section consists of a 6-point Likert-type scale in which responses range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and a series of short open-ended questions. The second section consists of questions eliciting demographic and background information. It is important to note that the statements and questions in the

parent and teacher forms were designed to parallel each other as closely as possible in order to facilitate comparisons between these two respondent groups.

A pool of items was generated from a review of the literature in the field as well as from input from parents and teachers at national conferences, local meetings and informal conversations. This original pool was reviewed for content and clarity by educational and psychosocial researchers, a psychometrician, as well as parents and teachers. It was then refined into its current form as two parallel surveys.

Split/half reliability coefficients which were computed are .70 for the Parent Survey and .78 for the Teacher Survey. An item analysis revealed low inter-item correlations for some items and low variability for a few other items. These items will not be included in any future administrations of the survey.

Sample

The sample included 282 parents and 121 teachers: 101 parents and 26 teachers associated with a suburban public junior high school in the greater New York area; 110 parents and 22 teachers affiliated with a private, state-supported pre K-12 school for children with severe physical disabilities in New York; 27 parents and 59 teachers from a prototypic

mainstreamed school in an industrial city in Michigan; and 44 parents and 14 teachers associated with an inner city, reverse-mainstreamed school in California. The survey was mailed to parents and teachers once. It was followed two weeks later with a reminder post card. This has generated a return rate of approximately 50%, which we believe to be most satisfactory considering the length of the survey and the amount of time needed to complete it.

Data from each of the four schools will be analyzed and reported individually. This will be followed by cross-school comparisons.

1. Public School (7-8)

a) Parents

Eighty-nine percent of the 101 parents who responded to the survey were mothers and 92% of the sample were married. At least one parent in each family was employed full or part-time; most held professional positions (75%) and had graduate degrees (51%). This reflects the upper-middle class community in which the school is located. Only 7% reported having a disabled child enrolled in the school, and none of these children were described as being severely disabled. Approximately half of the respondents have had contact with relatives, friends or co-workers who are disabled and 3% reported having a disability themselves.

About 85% of the parents thought that their children are appropriately independent for their ages, while 15% thought that their children should act more independently.

Not surprisingly, most parents (69%) have high or very high expectations for their child's future educational and career goals. However, about 20% of the parents surveyed hoped that their children would achieve personal satisfaction and fulfillment above all else and de-emphasized the importance of their children achieving purely financially successful careers. Parents strongly supported (87%) incorporating career education into the existing curriculum and 95% stressed the importance of career guidance.

Sixty-five percent of the respondents favor mainstreaming disabled students into their childrens' classes. The large majority of parents who support mainstreaming feel that having disabled and able-bodied students in the same classes presents a more realistic view of the world. Many parents indicated that by being in a mainstreamed class their able-bodied children would better learn how to empathize with people who are different from them and their sensitivity to other peoples needs would increase. Twenty-one percent of the parents were unsure or had mixed feelings about mainstreaming, and 14% were opposed to it. A sizable number of parents had real concerns about this issue. The most prevalent was that teachers would

not be able to devote sufficient amount of attention to their children if disabled students were in the same class. (Currently, there are only two classroom aides in the school.) Parents are also concerned about the number of disabled students that would be mainstreamed and the nature of the mainstreamed student's disability. Reflecting their concern about teacher attention, many parents hoped that the proportion of disabled students would be small, and some parents expressed considerable apprehension about integrating emotionally and/or mentally-impaired students into a regular school program. Parents were not only concerned about the psychological effects this would have on their own children, but were also concerned about the welfare of the emotionally and mentally handicapped student. They believed that these students would benefit more if they were educated in a non-threatening, smaller, special school environment.

Many parents stated that they lack sufficient information about mainstreaming, and would like to learn more about it before judging its merits and disadvantages. A number of parents also stated or implied that policymakers should consider parents' perspectives before deciding on mainstreaming policies.

b) Teachers

Forty-six percent of the 26 respondents were female and the median number of years teaching experience was 18. Fifty-two

percent had at least a masters degree, 32% had some training in special educaton and 81% had taught students with disabilities; the majority of these students had learning, emotional and/or physical disabilities. Seventy-two percent had a friend, relative or co-worker with a disability. Only one teacher reported having a disability.

Teachers were virtually unanimous in their belief that a teacher's role includes fostering student independence and preparing students for their educational and career future. However, there was some disagreement as to whether career education should be a formal component of the school curriculum. Teachers did not seem to feel that it was part of their job to teach a specific career education curriculum: perhaps this would be the responsibility of a guidance counselor.

Regarding mainstreaming, 65% of the respondents were very enthusiastic about teaching a mainstreamed class, 22% were opposed to teaching a mainstreamed class and 13% weren't sure. Thirty-five percent had no concerns about mainstreaming. The remaining teachers cited adequate preparation for mainstreaming and having staff support as their primary concerns.

When asked to specify the type of preparation they thought necessary to teach a mainstreamed class, approximately one third said information about disabilities was important, 23%

said information about specific disabled children, and 20% indicated special education training.

2. Special Private School (pre-K-12)

a) Parents

One hundred and ten parents from the special school, all of whom have a severely disabled child attending the school, responded to the survey.

Eighty-one percent of the respondents were mothers and 83% are married. The median educational level for respondents and spouses is approximately 12.8 and one-third completed college. In 95% of the families, at least one parent is employed full or part-time, and approximately half of those employed hold professional or managerial positions. Forty-three percent have had friends, relatives or co-workers with a disability, and 6% of the respondents reported having a disability themselves.

More than half (55%) of the respondents feel that their children are appropriately independent for their age and 46% feel their children are somewhat less independent or dependent. Considering the relatively high number of parents who felt that their children are not appropriately independent for their age, parental expectations for their child's future were generally high: parents expected their children to complete high school (43%), college (29%) and graduate school

(6%). Seventy-seven percent had spoken to their children about their expectations and, further supporting these expressed expectations, is the fact that 97% of the parents thought that career education should be a regular part of the school's curriculum.

About half (51%) of the parents did not want their children to be in a mainstreamed class. Their primary concerns about mainstreaming centered on their childrens' physical safety (67%) and social relationships (26%).

A number of parents indicated that their children were happy attending this special school and, therefore, they would not consider mainstreaming; however, if mainstreaming had been an option when their child was starting school, they might have considered it. Policymakers, therefore, should be alert to the greater potential for mainstreaming disabled children at the early childhood level. Older children and their parents are more likely to have difficulties making the adjustment from a familiar, non-threatening school environment to a regular school in which their physical safety may be less secure and social relationships with peers may be more difficult to develop.

b) Teachers

All of the twenty-two teachers who responded to the survey teach physically disabled students. Eighty-nine percent were

female and the median number of years teaching was 8. Ninety-five percent have graduate degrees, 40% of them in the area of special education. Only 10% have had no formal professional training in special education. Eighty-six percent have had contact with disabled relatives, friends or co-workers. One teacher reported having a disability herself. While the primary disability of all the students in the school is physical, teachers reported that a majority of students also have learning disabilities and approximately 50% have intellectual impairments.

All of the teachers feel that encouraging independence among students is an important part of a teachers job. Approximately three-quarters feel that their students demonstrate self-confidence when interacting with each other.

Although 42% of the teachers do not have high career aspirations for their students, 73% believe that their students will be gainfully employed after completing their education. Furthermore, 95% are in favor of incorporating career education into the regular school curriculum, and feel that it is important that as teachers, they prepare students for their educational and career futures.

Although approximately 60% would enthusiastically teach in a mainstreamed setting and expressed little or no concerns about doing so, about one-third were opposed to teaching

mainstreamed classes. Teachers' concerns centered on the amount of support they would get from staff and administrators and on the amount of teacher attention both disabled and able-bodied students would receive.

One-third of the respondents felt that they would require no further preparation to teach in a mainstreamed setting. Those who did feel the need for further preparation indicated that they would need more information about disabilities and would require further special education training.

Regarding the value of mainstreaming, approximately 80% of the respondents believe that it is socially beneficial to have able-bodied and disabled students in the same classes. Ninety-five percent felt that disabled students should be expected to compete academically with able-bodied students in a mainstreamed setting, despite having other concerns. For example, teachers believe that their students are more likely to lack initiative and require more teacher attention than other able-bodied students.

Interestingly, more than three-quarters of the respondents feel that it is important to employ teachers with physical disabilities in mainstreamed schools, but less than half agreed that only teachers trained to educate students with disabilities should be allowed to teach disabled students.

This finding reflects the philosophy of this school, which is that it is important to have the perspective of general education teachers as well as special educators in a special school.

3. Mainstreamed School (K-12)

a) Parents

Seventy-three percent of the 26 parents who responded to the survey were mothers and only 52% of the total sample were married. Seventy-three percent have a child with a disability. At least one parent in each family is employed full or part-time. About one-quarter of the parents employed held professional or managerial positions, 15% held clerical positions and the remainder were employed in blue collar jobs. About 15% of the parents were college graduates and approximately half had graduated from high school. Slightly more than half (54%) of the respondents have had contact with a disabled relative, friend or co-worker and 20% have a disability themselves.

The majority (60%) felt that their children were appropriately independent and a similar percentage (68%) expected their children to complete high school. Eighty-three percent felt career education should be a regular part of the school's curriculum.

Sixty-nine percent wanted their child to be in a mainstreamed class, however, two qualifications were frequently mentioned:

Parents of able-bodied students were concerned that the presence of disabled children in the classroom might distract their children from their academic work and reduce the amount of teacher attention they would receive;

Parents of disabled children were very concerned about how the able-bodied students would treat their children; several seemed to expect or anticipate that their child would be made fun of.

b) Teachers

Fifty-one percent of the 59 mainstreamed teachers who responded to the questionnaire were female. The median number of years of teaching experience of the entire sample was 10 and approximately 75% had masters degrees. Ninety-eight percent had had experience teaching students with physical disabilities and 31% had had professional training in special education. (The primary disability for 98% of the students is physical; approximately 70% also had learning, emotional and/or visual disabilities.) Sixty-seven percent had friends or relatives with a disability and 5% had disabilities themselves.

All of the teachers felt it was important to encourage independence in their students, and over 60% felt that their students demonstrated self-confidence and initiative in the classroom.

There was considerable support for career education as a regular component of the school curriculum. Seventy-four percent of the respondents said it was important, and, further supporting this, 97% felt it was very important for teachers to prepare students for their educational and/or career future.

Ninety-six percent were enthusiastic about teaching a mainstreamed class, although, 76% also had some concerns about their decision. Specifically, 54% cited architectural modifications, and 32% mentioned teacher preparation. The relatively high proportion of teachers who cited architectural modifications as a concern may be partially explained by the fact that extensive and sophisticated architectural modifications were recently made in their mainstreamed school. Of the teachers who thought there was a need for teacher preparation, 38% specified special education training, 31% wanted information about disabilities, 21% requested information about specific disabled children and 40% cited other means. Only 2% mentioned field work and 10% said that further preparation wasn't necessary.

4. Reverse Mainstreamed School (K-8)

a) Parents

Eighty-four percent of the 44 parents who responded to the survey were mothers and 70% were married. Fifty-five percent had a disabled child attending the school and 45% had an able-bodied child enrolled in the school. In 82% of the families at least one parent is employed full or part-time. Almost half of the parents employed held professional or managerial positions and approximately one-fourth were employed in service occupations. Nineteen percent of the respondents had completed college and 44% had graduated from high school. Forty percent had friends, relatives or co-workers with a disability, and 12% had disabilities themselves.

The majority of the respondents felt their child was appropriately independent for his/her age, however parents of able-bodied children were more than twice as likely as parents of disabled children to be in favor of activities which supported their child's independence, such as having spending money, a summer job, and choosing their own clothes. Most parents expected their child to graduate from high school and thought career education was very important for their child's development. Eighty percent were glad their children attended a reverse-mainstreamed school.

In a number of questions there were significant differences between the responses of parents of able-bodied children and those of parents of disabled children. Most of the differences were in those questions which related to mainstreaming. Parents of able-bodied students were consistently more supportive of mainstreaming than were parents of disabled students. Parents of disabled students were more than twice as likely to be concerned about their child's physical and emotional well-being, academic performance, participation in extra-curricular activities in a mainstreamed school, and the financial costs of mainstreaming, than were parents of able-bodied children. Moreover, only 42% of the parents of disabled children agreed that mainstreamed schools should employ some teachers with disabilities. In contrast, three-quarters of the parents of able-bodied students supported this viewpoint.

b) Teachers

The 14 reverse-mainstreamed teachers who responded to the questionnaire had a median number of 11 years teaching experience. Ninety-three percent of the respondents were women, 86% had some special education training, and 50% had graduate degrees. Almost all had some teaching assistance in their classroom. Sixty-four percent had a friend, relative or co-worker with a disability, but none of the respondents reported having a disability themselves.

Respondents unanimously agreed that a teachers' role includes encouraging independence among students and preparing them for their educational and career future. They also were unanimously in favor of incorporating career education into the school curriculum. These responses reflect the school's philosophy of providing students with "option time", i.e. having them make the decision as to which of several educational activities they would like to pursue. This consensus among the teachers extended to their support of mainstreaming. Many of them mentioned the benefit of mainstreaming for able-bodied students as well as for those with physically disabilities: "Some handicapped can be an excellent example to the nonhandicapped in encouraging independence ", wrote one teacher, and another, who operates a mainstreamed summer camp, wrote, "One thing I believe very strongly is that mainstreaming must be seen as of equal benefit to the nonhandicapped as to handicapped children".

The only concern expressed about mainstreaming pertained to the integration of mentally retarded students into regular classrooms. Fourteen percent of the teachers were against mainstreaming this population. (Several of the public school parents expressed the same concern.) The general philosophy of the teachers may be best expressed by one who wrote, "I believe in the basic philosophy of integrating nonhandicapped and

handicapped children of the same intellectual capacities...I've taught in a reverse-mainstreamed school for seven years."

The suggestions for preparing teachers for mainstreaming were quite similar: most respondents indicated the value of having information about different disabilities and experience in the field. One respondent detailed five factors for successful mainstreaming which seem to reflect the school's own philosophy: providing a quality program for the regular students, supportive administration, opportunities for interaction and free expression among students and encouraging an attitude of community and cooperation.

Cross School Comparisons

Parent Findings

Results indicate that parents from the three schools differed more in their attitudes towards mainstreaming than in their attitudes about the two other areas of the study, independence and future education and career expectations. In these areas, substantial agreement among parents was found. The majority of parents from the regular school, the mainstreamed school and the reverse-mainstreamed school favored mainstreaming for their children. However, less than one-third of the special school parents surveyed felt that their children would benefit from being in a mainstreamed setting. Many parents of children in the special school wrote that they were

very happy that their children were attending the school. Although some indicated that mainstreaming might be worthwhile, there was usually a great deal of uncertainty and hesitancy expressed; parents were reluctant to remove their children once they had attended the special school for several years. Some parents wrote that if this option had been available to them when their child was starting school, they might have chosen it. Several parents of children at the early childhood level mentioned mainstreaming as a future possibility. For example, one kindergarten parent indicated to us that mainstreaming might be good for his child when he was older, but not now.

A majority of parents in the special school environment are also concerned about the physical safety of their children in a mainstreamed setting. Forty-two percent of the parents of disabled students in the reverse-mainstreamed school, about one-fourth of the parents in the mainstreamed school, a very small percentage (2%) of parents from the regular school expressed this concern. Parents of special school children were also concerned that their child would have less opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities in a mainstreamed school, as were 45% of the parents of disabled children attending the reverse-mainstreamed school. Parents in the mainstreamed school and regular school did not have this concern. Only 20% of the parents of disabled children in the reverse-mainstreamed school and about one-half of the parents

in the mainstreamed and regular schools thought that their children would not receive enough teacher attention in a mainstreamed class, as contrasted with more than three-quarters of the parents in the special school who expressed this concern.

Teacher Findings

Paralleling the parent findings, special school teachers expressed more concern about mainstreaming than either regular, mainstreamed or reverse-mainstreamed school teachers. Reverse-mainstreamed teachers expressed the least concern. Major concerns of the teachers included receiving staff support and adequate teacher preparation. Other concerns included architectural accommodations and the type of disabled student to be mainstreamed. Many teachers from all four groups expressed a need to learn more about different disabilities to be adequately prepared to teach a mainstreamed class. In addition, teachers from the reverse-mainstreamed school were more likely to express a need for field work with students with disabilities.

Special school teachers generally do not perceive their students as being as independent as other students their age, this is in contrast to the views of regular, mainstreamed and reverse-mainstreamed school teachers. Special school teachers feel that their students need more teacher attention than most other children their age, that they do not have as much

initiative as other students, and are uncertain as to whether their students will be able to live independently from their parents after completing their education. Given these beliefs about their disabled students, it is not surprising that special school teachers are more likely to question the value of mainstreaming.

With regard to career expectations, regular, maintreamed and reverse-mainstreamed school teachers have a decidedly more positive outlook concerning their students' potential than do special school teachers. However, special school teachers were not entirely pessimistic; a large majority felt that it is important to discuss future educational and career plans with their students and, although uncertainty exists, approximately one-half of special school teachers believe that their students have the potential to achieve a successful career. This somewhat positive outlook of special school teachers may in part be due to the impact of a career education program that has been implemented in the school from 1977-1981. Teachers have been providing work-related experiences for their students and actually see many of their students successfully holding part-time and summer jobs within HRC as a part of the Work Experience program.

Conclusions

In comparing responses of parents and teachers within schools, the greatest agreement was found between the regular

school parents and teachers. However, even within this group some differences did exist.

Public School

The data findings indicate that both parents and teachers associated with the public school generally believe that their children and students are appropriately or very independent for their ages, although teachers, more than parents, felt that their students needed teacher attention and were more concerned about the physical safety of their students at school. This belief is correlated with relatively high parent and teacher expectations regarding their childrens' and students' educational and career futures.

Concomitant to these findings is the fact that both parents and teachers associated with this school expressed strong support for mainstreaming, albeit not without some concerns. However, the focus of their concerns differed somewhat. Parents were more concerned than teachers about whether their children would receive sufficient attention from teachers in a mainstreamed classroom, the number of students with disabilities who would be mainstreamed, and the nature of the mainstreamed students' disability. Two-thirds of the teachers, however, expressed concern about whether they would be adequately prepared to teach a mainstreamed class, specifically, whether they would receive any special education training and whether they would obtain information about

disabilities and the disabled students who would be mainstreamed. They also expressed concern about whether their administrators and colleagues would be able to give them enough support if they assumed this added responsibility.

One of the few differences between parents and teachers was that almost two-thirds of the parents, as opposed to one-third of the teachers, felt that only teachers with special education training should be allowed to teach disabled students. This finding is interesting since teachers did express a need for special education training as preparation for mainstreaming. The differences may lie in the amount and type of special education training. Although teachers generally feel that it is important to attend a workshop on the subject, many would be opposed to being required to complete a number of college level courses. The findings, however, did indicate that teacher preparation is a concern of both parents and teachers. The amount and type of preparation which is adequate needs to be researched further.

Much of this support for mainstreaming stems from a general belief among parents and teachers that fundamental to a school's purpose to better prepare students to lead independent, fruitful lives, is that students should be provided with as many realistic experiences as possible. Encouraging independence among students by offering them choices, career education, and integrating students with

disabilities into regular school settings are all seen to be essential parts of this process.

It should be noted, however, that parents' and teachers' current attitudes about their children and students may affect these findings. That is, if parents and teachers perceived their children and students as being less independent and held lower expectations for them, perhaps, feeling that their children and students would not be able to handle a mainstreamed situation, their attitudes toward mainstreaming would be less favorable. It should be remembered that the results suggest but do not confirm this since very few parents and teachers held such limited views about their children and students. What can be learned from this, however, is that parents and teachers opinions are both important and the type of school and the surrounding community should be considered before any mainstreaming policy is instituted.

Special School

Although parents' perceptions regarding their children's level of independence and future potential were not nearly as high as the attitudes of the parents of able-bodied students in the sample, more than half of the parents associated with this special school think that their children are appropriately independent, and more than three-quarters feel that their child will complete high school and be gainfully employed. Special School teachers, however, are not as likely as parents to

perceive their students as demonstrating independence; they see their students as lacking initiative in comparison with other students their age. However, teachers are more likely than parents to perceive their students as having the potential for achieving a successful career. This surprising finding may be explained by the fact that teachers have been involved in a Career Education program for the past four years, and only recently have parents been formally introduced to this program. Also, the teachers are exposed to several vocational training programs at the facility where the school is located. Further substantiating the positive effect of this Career Education program is the fact that both parents and teachers expressed almost unanimous support for a Career Education program as part of the school curriculum.

In the area of mainstreaming, special school teachers appeared to be generally more in favor of this policy than parents. Although a majority of parents are opposed to mainstreaming their children into regular school settings, this should not be interpreted to mean that they are against the concept of mainstreaming. Many parents indicated that mainstreaming may be beneficial for some disabled children but not their own, and many parents of older children stated that they would be in favor of mainstreaming if their children could have been mainstreamed at an earlier age. What is important to remember, therefore, is that each situation is different and regardless of disability every child is unique. Thus,

policymakers should recognize the individual nature of each situation as they set mainstreaming policy.

The concerns that special school teachers expressed centered on their role as teachers, whereas the primary concerns of parents focused on whether their children would be able to adapt to a mainstreamed setting. Interestingly, while both parents and teachers were concerned about the academic progress of their children/students in a mainstreamed class, this concern was secondary to other concerns. Parents were most concerned about whether their children's physical safety would be endangered if they were mainstreamed and also were worried that their children's social relationships would suffer. This concern was also voiced by parents of disabled students in the mainstreamed school and is of critical importance. This indicates that schools which have not had much experience in integrating severely disabled children must not only provide adequate preparation for their teachers and staff, but must also prepare the able-bodied students. Teachers in regular schools must demonstrate to their students that disabled students are individuals like themselves who have much to give in terms of friendships and sharing of experiences. In turn, parents of disabled children must be given reasonable assurance that basic physical accommodations have been made and their child's physical safety will be protected.

While special school teachers had concerns about mainstreaming which focused on their role as teachers, they were, unlike public school teachers, less concerned about receiving more training or preparation (most teachers from this school held special education degrees). Rather, their primary concerns were whether they would have adequate support from school administrators and other staff and whether they would be able to devote enough attention to all students in their classes. This signals a possible need for having some type of classroom assistance: aides, volunteers, teaching assistants, or parents, or a need to reduce class size. Of course, paid teacher aides and reducing class size would incur additional expenses and may not be practical in light of the financial limitations which are imposed on many school budgets.

Mainstreamed School

The majority of parents whose children attend the mainstreamed school believed their children were appropriately independent, expected them to complete high school, and were in favor of career education. The teachers' responses paralleled those of the parents.

There was a lack of unanimity regarding mainstreaming among teachers, parents of able-bodied students and parents of disabled students. More than 70% of the parents of disabled students favored mainstreaming, as did 94% of the teachers. However, only 38% of the parents of able-bodied students supported mainstreaming.

Parents of disabled students cited the need for normalcy, the need for their children to be with others the same age, the importance of competing with one's peers, and lessening the feeling of being different. They were concerned, however, that their children might be mistreated or made fun of by their classmates.

Parents of able-bodied students wrote that their children would learn about children with disabilities and see that handicaps can be overcome. However, many were concerned about the possibly distracting effect of having disabled children in the classroom and the possibility of decreased teacher attention for their children.

Teachers' reasons for supporting mainstreaming tended to be more idealistic than the parents' more practical reasons. Some wrote of the importance of having the classroom be a microcosm of society, of the social benefits to both able-bodied and disabled students, and the fact that given support from the administration and background information about the students with disabilities they felt professionally qualified to teach a mainstreamed class. Interestingly, only one teacher brought up the legal right of disabled students to a public education.

In view of these findings, it might be worthwhile to have teachers conduct parent discussion groups in which parents of able-bodied and disabled students could discuss their concerns

about mainstreaming and teachers could present the classroom management techniques they use to deal with these issues, which might allay parental concerns.

It is interesting that although teachers in both the mainstreamed and reverse-mainstreamed schools were virtually unanimous in their support of mainstreaming, the parental responses in the two schools differed. In the reverse mainstreamed school, the parents of able-bodied students were more in favor of mainstreaming than the parents of the disabled students, while in the mainstreamed school the reverse was true.

The more positive attitude of the parents of able-bodied students in the reverse-mainstreamed school is probably due to the fact that they voluntarily send their children to the school, whereas the parents of able-bodied students attending the mainstreamed school do not have that choice. Also, more than twice as many parents of disabled students in the mainstreamed school responded to the survey as did parents of able-bodied students, which may also have affected the results.

Reverse-Mainstreamed

In the reverse-mainstreamed school parents of able-bodied students were significantly more in favor of activities that would support their child's independence than were parents of disabled students. Parents of able-bodied children also supported mainstreaming significantly more than parents of

children with disabilities. Both groups of parents, however, felt positively about their childrens' career future.

Teachers were virtually unanimous in their support of activities that would promote their students independence, such as providing students with time during the day to do what they like and being responsible for specific classroom jobs. Therefore, teachers could discuss methods of encouraging and supporting the independence of students with disabilities with the students' parents. It is likely that these parents would be receptive to such suggestions since they had very high career expectations for their children; they all expected their children to be employed and 89% felt that their children had the potential for achieving a successful career.

Since parents of able-bodied students and teachers responded very similarly, and all three groups were unanimous in their agreement that learning about careers should be part of the school curriculum, a Career Education program might be a good vehicle for carrying out projects which encourage students' independence. Also, parents of disabled students might feel more positive about mainstreaming if they could see their children working cooperatively with able-bodied students on career education projects. This idea is supported by research which has shown that more positive social interaction develops between able-bodied and disabled students if they work cooperatively, rather than independently or competitively, on

projects (Salend, 1981; Stainback et al., 1981). Parents' concerns about their child's physical and emotional well-being and participation in extra-curricular activities might also be allayed by such activities.

A reverse-mainstreamed school seems to be one good alternative to traditional mainstreaming for those students whose disabilities are so severe that they need to be in a special school. Since parents of the able-bodied students voluntarily enroll their children in the special school, they are likely to be highly supportive of the program and their children would be less likely to make fun of disabled classmates. Therefore, some of the concerns that parents of disabled children have about mainstreaming are not as likely to occur. Furthermore, the students with disabilities will probably be in the majority, or near majority, and will thus have the security that comes from being in the majority, which should make it easier for them to feel comfortable in an integrated class. Finally, the teachers in the reverse mainstreamed school were very enthusiastic about their work, and would therefore set a positive tone in the classroom that would encourage strong academic performances and positive social interactions.

Discussion and Recommendations

In conclusion, certain recommendations can be made from the data:

1. Regular and especially special school teachers had more trepidations about mainstreaming than did teachers in a mainstreamed or reverse-mainstreamed school. This indicates that teaching in an integrated school may lessen these concerns. Further research should focus on identifying factors that contribute to the more positive outlook of teachers in mainstreamed and reverse-mainstreamed schools.

2. Since special school teachers had the least positive attitudes towards mainstreaming and generally saw their students as being less capable than did regular or mainstreamed teachers, it is suggested that increased contact and exposure to regular education and mainstreamed programs could improve the attitudes of special education teachers towards their students.

3. The distinctly more negative attitudes of special education parents towards mainstreaming suggest that placement of disabled students into mainstreamed environments should be done cautiously and only with the full cooperation of parents, as well as teachers and other professionals. It also suggests that a mainstreamed environment is not the least restrictive environment for every student. Further research in this area needs to be done. The fact that the two major concerns of parents and teachers are the students' physical safety and opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, further support this premise. These two areas--physical safety

and extra-curricular activities--should be focused on by public schools as they attempt to integrate disabled students into their schools.

4. Teachers seem to view mainstreaming primarily in terms of the effect it will have on their jobs. Specifically, to what extent will mainstreaming make it necessary for them to change their teaching procedures and classroom management techniques, and how successful will they be in carrying out these modifications. It seems imperative, then, that teachers be given the utmost support both before and during the mainstreaming process. This study has identified the type of support teachers would like, and their requests should be included in the planning of a support system.

5. Although parents of special school students generally thought that a special school would be more socially beneficial for their children than a mainstreamed school, they need to be aware of the importance of having their children develop the social skills necessary to function successfully in an integrated setting, be it college, work, a party, or restaurant.

6. The primary concern of parents of able-bodied students is their childrens' academic achievement. Interestingly, the reasons that parents of able-bodied students in the regular public school gave for being in favor of mainstreaming generally related to the social or personal benefits it would

bring to their child, i.e. appreciation of individual differences, a more realistic environment, learning how others cope with the problems. However, several parents of older (6th-8th grades) able-bodied children in the reverse-mainstreamed school wrote that although they were very happy with the social and personal benefits of an integrated school, they were concerned about the school's academic standards, and whether their children would be able to compete successfully with students from other schools. Therefore, it can be concluded that the older the students, the greater the parents' concern with their academic performance, and that maintaining high academic standards is one factor that contributes to a successful mainstreaming program in the middle and secondary school years.

7. Parents of disabled children who are in favor of mainstreaming for their children often state that they want them to be in a more normal environment, to be educated in a regular school with other students of normal intelligence. However, parents of able-bodied children who support mainstreaming often see it as an opportunity for their own children to see how people with severe difficulties cope and to be in a more realistic environment, one in which all kinds of people are represented and individual differences are respected.

There is a conflict, therefore, in the expectations that the two parent groups have about mainstreaming. Parents of

disabled children tend to see it as an opportunity for their children to become part of a normal class, one in which their similarities with the able-bodied children (normal intelligence, especially) will be emphasized and their physical differences minimized. However, parents of able-bodied children perceive mainstreaming as an opportunity for their children to develop an awareness and empathy for people who are different from themselves. (Interestingly, none of the parents mentioned the legal right of children with disabilities to a free, public education in the least restrictive environment, which is often their local public school.)

Therefore, it would benefit mainstreaming programs if parents of both able-bodied and disabled students could meet together with their children's classroom teacher to discuss the expectations they have for their children, and how the school's philosophy and curriculum will affect these expectations.

8. The majority of teachers stated that general information about disabilities and specific information about students with disabilities in their own class would be the most desirable type of preparation for mainstreaming. Special education courses were also mentioned as being useful. Interestingly, only teachers in the reverse mainstreamed school, who were the most positive about mainstreaming, mentioned field work as a means of preparation. This may be a result of their having a teacher-preparation course for mainstreaming offered at their school that includes field work.

In view of the fact that the majority of parents in all four schools agreed that only teachers who have been trained to educate students with disabilities should be allowed to teach disabled students, and that teachers themselves think preparation is needed to teach a mainstreamed class, it is important that further research be done on the most effective methods of preparing teachers to teach a mainstreamed class. Research has been done on teacher preparation methods, but the objective is usually to determine which method is most effective in changing teacher attitudes towards disabled students; it does not evaluate the relation between type of preparation and effective teaching, as measured by student performance.

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